Life is a Work in Progress

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Life is a Work in Progress

by Azure_K_Mello

Summary

Will’s dad sets plans in motion while getting to know Hannibal and Will studies his life.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

All the ink was dry on the land papers, the blueprints and contractors in under a week. Will was always amazed by the way his dad could get stuff done and the construction was set to break ground the day after his dad left. His dad baked cupcakes for his birthday and Will loved them. He shared them with Abigail and they ate them in the little conservatory at the hospital as it was raining. They still had a good time. His dad baked so many that Will invited Alana to dinner just to share them. Hannibal avoided them at all cost. The number of excuses he came up with was adorable and finally Will said, “Just admit it: you don’t like blue food.”

Hannibal nodded, “It’s true. I just can’t face the dyes.”

“You’re missing out,” said Will. “It’s even got brand-name icing.”

“Brand-name?” repeated Hannibal raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah, it’s Dunkin Hines, not store-brand.”

Hannibal nodded slowly, “How chic.”

“Some of us didn’t get born in a castle, Hannibal,” Will said with a smile. “Some of us think brand-name icing is great.” Hannibal hadn’t responded just kissed Will slowly.

“I think you’re great. I just don’t want to eat a cupcake covered in mass produced icing,” Hannibal said against his lips. That had made Will laugh and had left more cupcakes for him and his dad.

His dad looked at him one morning, after Hannibal had gone to work, and said, “Are you gonna be okay with strangers being so close to your house? With the construction? I could take more time off.”

“No, these are contractors Alana used for her house. She liked them, they were working in her house when she was there. It’ll be okay, Daddy,” Will assured him.

“Okay,” his dad nodded. They were supposed to be going to the opera that night and his dad asked, “Can I cut your hair, please? You look so scruffy and we’re going someplace fancy.”

“Sure,” Will agreed. “But, honestly, no one but the hoity-toity asses care what people wear. No one who works there cares. Hannibal doesn’t.” He grabbed a towel and they headed out to the back porch.

He tilted his head at all the right times and when his dad was his done he said, “A perfect puppy cut, now you match your dogs.”

“Thanks, Daddy, that’s great.” He ran his hands over his head and said, “Feels good.”

“Looks good too,” said his dad with a smile. “At some point you’re gonna learn to let a stranger touch your hair for the duration of a haircut.”

“You’re moving here,” Will shrugged. It was only as hour later when Hannibal came home. He was already wearing a tuxedo and Will’s mouth went dry. Hannibal looked him up and down, clearly considering his hair. “Like it?” asked Will, feeling absurdly nervous.

“Like it?” repeated Hannibal. “I want to throw you down on the floor and do all sorts of things I can’t do while your dad is in the kitchen. It’s equal parts sexy and adorable. Where did you get it done?”

“My porch,” said Will. “Daddy always cuts my hair.”

“He’s great at sexy cute haircuts,” said Hannibal stroking his neck and pulling him in for a kiss. “Of course, he was working with good material.” He kissed him again.

Will kissed him slowly, “You look so good in a tux. Let’s just skip the opera. You’re in a suit and I have good hair.” Hannibal laughed against him lips.

Then Winston butted his head against Hannibal’s hips. Hannibal turned and stroked him, “Hello, Winston, did you have a good day? You’re gonna be so sad when your Will goes back to work.”

“Oh, don’t say it. I hate the idea,” said Will.

“Quit and get a job at PetCo.”

The dogs all started barking and Will winced, “Really, Hannibal, really?”

“Sorry,” said Hannibal. “I didn’t think about it. But I also didn’t expect them to be quite this boisterous.”

It took Will a couple of minutes to hush them, with soft words and calming hands, and his dad came in saying, “Honey, what happened?”

“Hannibal didn’t spell P.E.T.C.O.” Will said.

“Amateur mistake,” said his dad with a wide grin at Hannibal. They calmed the dogs slowly and once they were normal again his dad smiled at Hannibal, “It’s a mistake you only ever make once.”

“Quite,” agreed Hannibal. “If only they understood how much more fun the opera is.”

“We just need to get dressed, I told you we could meet you there. You drove all the way here just to drive all the way back.”

“I wanted to say good evening to the dogs and drop off desert.” He held out a box, “Cake. Perhaps not as emotionally satisfying as rainbow cupcakes but, hopefully, it satisfies.”

“The only reason the cupcakes are good is because of the sentimental value,” said his dad. “There is no way I could possibly compete with your skill in the kitchen.”

Hannibal just smiled, “Your son learned to cook from you. It’s a different style but no less delicious and impressive. I’ll put this down in the kitchen and let the dogs out while you change.” He kissed Will’s cheek, “The hair is gorgeous.” Will went into his room to change and it was only a few moments before Hannibal came in. “I was fibbing when I said I just came to drop off the cake. I mostly came to see you changing into a suit.”

Will laughed, “You really look good in a tux.”

Hannibal came to him and kissed him as he helped Will button his dress shirt. “You look good in cargo pants and a fishing vest.” Then he went to Will’s tie rack and picked one. He came back and tied it for Will. “Gorgeous man.”

“Ready to go?” asked Will.

“Yes,” said Hannibal running a hand down Will’s back and grabbing his suit jacket from the bed.

Will shrugged into it and said, “Let’s get the dogs inside.” They left and Will opened the backdoor as he poured out the dogs’ dinner. They all ran in at the noise. Will stood quickly, aware of their fur on his dark suit. “Now, boys, we’ll be gone a few hours. Be good, boys.” He patted them each. His dad came in, suited up. “Looking good, Daddy.”

“Can’t let the side down,” he said. “Ready?”

“Yes,” agreed Will.

They drove and Will said, “What’s this one about? What’s the language?”

“The Fairy-Queen is an operatic adaptation of a Midsummer Night’s Dream. It is in English and you will like it: it’s a wedding comedy. We will have missed drinks and go straight up to the box.”

“I’m sorry, did I hold you up?” asked his dad.

Hannibal threw a smile to him, “No, not at all, Richard. We always miss drinks; Will would find the cocktail hour excruciating.”

They pull up to the curb and the doors are instantly opened by people wishing them a good evening. Inside a woman started walking toward them and Hannibal hissed through his teeth. “Bad?” asked Will.

“And unavoidable,” Hannibal replied then put on a bright smile, “Mrs. Komeda, what a pleasure.”

“Oh, Hannibal, you always stand on such formality,” she said with a laugh. Will knew how Hannibal felt about formality. He put himself on first name basis with people he viewed as equals. “You’ve been very naughty, no one’s heard from you: it’s been ages since you’ve thrown a party and every time you’re here you hide up there in that box of yours. It’s a crime to deny us your company.”

“I’m afraid, Mrs. Komeda, that I shall be forced to deny you for just a little longer. The show is about to start. But I promise to come down at the intermission. Do excuse us.” He kept smiling until the door to his box was shut. “Oh, no,” he groaned.

“I thought she was rude,” Will said.

“She is,” agreed Hannibal. “But she’s actually a very kind and warm person. She’s exhausting.” Then he started to laugh. “She’s fun in small doses — excellent dinner party guest as long as I’m not sitting next to her.” He groaned as he sat down. “At least I won’t be leaving you alone.”

“Daddy should go down with you,” said Will smiling at his dad. “You’ll like it, Daddy, seeing how the other half lives.”

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” said Hannibal.

His dad nodded, “I’ve got a very thick Southern accent and I’m not going to be able to add to the opera conversation.”

Hannibal looked surprised, “Richard, I too have a very thick accent. I could never be embarrassed by your acquaintance. It’s them,” he nodded to the room in general. “They’re all such trivial people.”

“So why know them?” asked his dad.

“I’m on the same charity boards as half of them. I must know them.”

The lights started to dim and they all took their seats. Hannibal wrapped an arm around Will. Will curled into him. The play was lovely and fun and the music was great. This was exactly what he’d fantasized about when he’d seen Aida: being on a date with Hannibal.

Hannibal played with his hair and the music washed over him and everything was perfect in his world. When the lights came up Will said, “I like it.”

“I knew you would,” said Hannibal. Then he sighed, “I have to speak to Mrs. Komeda.” He stood and stretched.

“I’d like to come. Just to have a closer look at the chandler that we passed,” said his dad. “Opulent and garish sort of sums up this whole place.”

Hannibal nodded, “Yes, garish: not fully gar just gare-ish.” That made Will laugh. “We won’t tarry too long,” he said with a smile to Will.

“Have fun,” said Will, he flipped the call switch as they left.

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It was the first time he’d been alone with Hannibal. There were people but in all the time he’d been there Will had never been farther away than the bathroom. On the stairs he touched Hannibal’s arm and the man stopped and looked at him. “I’m glad he met you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal smiled, “Me too. And I’m very glad I met you. It’s been a pleasure getting to know the man who made Will who he is.”

“I don’t think I can take that much credit. I got no idea where he got that brain power from.”

Hannibal shook his head, “You’re an intelligent man but I wasn’t talking about how clever he was. I’ve had quite a few patients over the years with atypical brains who have grownup neurotic and depressed because their parents tried to ‘fix’ them. They were taught to feel broken, wrong, lacking because they couldn’t fit into the role their parents wanted. Will, when left alone by Jack Crawford, is a happy, well-adjusted man who has achieved great success — personally and professionally — despite his personality disorder because you taught him he could succeed. You taught him he was different but not damaged. Your love and support made him the man he is.”

“I’m proud of the man he is,” said Richard, feeling himself smile.

And Hannibal smiled back, “I’m proud of the fact that he counts me among his five friends.”

Richard felt warmed and said, “He’s never had five friends before. This past year, I call his cell phone and he says, ‘Can I call you back tonight? I’m eating lunch with Alana,’ or, ‘I’m sitting with Abigail,’ or, ‘I’m on my way out to meet Hannibal.' It's the busiest his social life has ever been. It makes me so happy to know he’s not waiting for our phone call as it’s the first real conversation he’s had all day.”

Hannibal nods, “He deserves all social life he likes.”

“Let’s go talk to your friend,” Richard said, “so that we can get back to that comfortable box.”

“Good idea,” agreed Hannibal. A woman came up the stairs and Hannibal said, “Good evening, Rachel.”

“Dr. Lecter, I thought I got called to your box,” said the girl. She was carrying a tray of hors d'oeuvres.

“Will is still upstairs,” said Hannibal, “his father and I were going to look at the gaudy yet impressive chandelier,” he smiled, “Rachel, this is Will’s father, Richard Graham. Richard, this is Rachel Yun.”

“Mr. Graham, it’s a pleasure.” She moved past them with the tray, “I’ll let you get on to the chandelier.”

Heading down into the main room and Richard saw Hannibal take a breath. The dreadful woman was holding court with flatterers surrounding her. Richard had never liked people like that. Queen bees was what people called them now he just thought of them as the girls who had mocked Will in high school. But he was much better than his son at playing nice. He smiled brightly as he and Hannibal approached.

“Hannibal, there you are. I was just saying how wicked you’ve been — hiding away.”

Hannibal smiled at her, “Yes, well-”

She interrupted him, “Who was that beautiful creature you walked in with? Is he the reason we’ve seen so little of you?”

“Yes, Will Graham and this is,” he started to gesture at Richard.

A man who was clinging on her arm but much too young to be her husband said, “The Will Graham? The forensic entomologist who broke the Hobbs case?”

Hannibal’s jaw ticked slightly. When Will was a kid he would stop talking for days sometimes, overwhelmed by an emotion or event. He would just pull away from the world and live inside himself. During those times Richard had learned to read his face to know how Will was feeling. Everyone else might have missed the tick of Hannibal’s jaw but Richard knew he was more than just a little bit irritated that he’d been interrupted twice. “Yes, Will and I-” he began but the man spoke over him.

“I thought he was some sort of an autistic savant who lived in the woods,” the man said. Richard saw the way Hannibal’s mouth moved and knew he was pushing his tongue against the back of his teeth. He was pissed, so pissed that Richard braced himself for an explosion.

“As I was saying,” said Hannibal with a clipped tone, “this is Will’s father Richard. My partner’s father has never been inside the Kennedy Center before and wanted to see the Orrefors crystal chandeliers. Excuse us.” He quickly steered Richard away and grabbed a champagne flute and a glass of soda off a passing tray. He gave a small smile to the man holding it, “Max, you look well.”

“It’s good to see you, Dr. Lecter.” Hannibal smiled but maneuvered Richard into the foyer with the chandeliers.

“Tell you a secret, Richard?” asked Hannibal, rolling his shoulders and clearly attempting to calm himself.

“Of course,” said Richard.

“You won’t tell your son? It’s something I’ll tell him some day.”

“Sure.”

“I hate approximately eight-five percent of people I meet. I loathe them. I’m not like Will. He can’t be friends with people he doesn’t like. I only like three of my friends… four if I may count you among my friends,” Richard nodded. “Will tries to avoid seeing the bad in people while I have to fight to see the good. I can see good qualities but I view most people as a collection of flaws. And the people here… they’re culture vultures. Good conversationalists if they pick the correct topic, deep pockets if I need to throw a fundraiser. If you and I, all the staff, crew, artists and Will walked out of this building right now and it collapsed the only thing of value the world would have lost is these magnificent, if absurd, chandeliers.” He smiled at Richard, “Your son thinks I am a nice and kind man. I try to be. I strive every day to make the world a better place for having me in it. I am a happy person but I hate everyone.”

“Don’t let that horrible man upset you. They don’t upset Will.”

Hannibal nodded and sipped his champagne. “I shouldn’t spend time with vapid people yet a party where champagne flows attracts them like flies to rotting fruit.”

Richard nodded and looked at the chandeliers, “They are pretty.”

“A gift from Sweden,” said Hannibal. “Shall we go back?”

Richard nodded and then smiled, “On the upside, you found a reason not to socialize with the exhausting Mrs. Komeda for a while.”

Hannibal laughed, “That is a silver lining.” Hannibal completely ignored everyone walking back toward the stairs but all eyes were on them and Richard was keenly aware of it.

Back in the box the girl, Rachel, was still there but now Will had a soda in his hand. He was laughing. That was a nice noise and Will seemed as comfortable as he ever did with a stranger, “You danced on a table?”

Hannibal shut the door behind them and repeated, “Rachel, you danced on a table?”

Rachel nodded, “Mr. Graham asked me if the primadonna was still likeable and I was telling him about the closing night of Aida.” She smiled at Richard. “We’re famous for the fact that two night after we close one show we open another. It means that for the last month and a half of a show we’re doing a different show during the day. Different sets, music, clothes, lighting cues, everything. It’s impressive but exhausting. We had a mean primadonna who was always angry, always fractious. And now we have Alissa. When the curtain went down on Aida her first words were, ‘Let’s get drunk.’ The old primadonna would never have hung out with us peasants. But, three nights ago, we were very drunk and Alissa and I were dancing on a table. And when I woke up I didn’t worry about whether or not I was going to get fired for getting drunk in front of the primadonna; I worried about whether or not I was going to be able to get out of bed.” The lights start to flash and she smiled, “Enjoy the rest of the show.”

“It was a pleasure, as always, Rachel,” said Hannibal.

“You too, Dr. Lecter,” she smiled at them all and said, “It was lovely to see you, Messrs. Graham.”

She shut the door behind herself and Hannibal said, “That just cheered me up.”

“Were you in a bad mood?” asked Will.

“A man downstairs was rude about you,” said Hannibal.

Will laughed, “What did he say?”

“He said you were an autistic savant who lived in the woods. He implied you were a strange hermit.”

Will laughed again, “Hannibal, I have a personality disorder, I have five friends, I live in the woods with seven dogs and I don’t make eye contact. What would you call me?”

“He talked over me while I was trying to introduce your father.”

“He was rude,” agreed Richard. “Very rude. Even if it’s true. You wouldn’t call someone fat and ugly to their friend. You wouldn’t talk over someone trying to introduce someone. It was rude. But now Hannibal doesn’t have to make nice with Mrs. Komeda for a while.”

Will laughed again and popped a tiny crab puff into his mouth. “Hannibal, is he the top forensic entomologist in America?” Hannibal shook his head. “Is he a respected professor at the FBI academy?” Hannibal shook his head. “Does he have seven sweet dogs?” Hannibal shook his head. “Is he sleeping with you?” Hannibal shook his head. “Then I won. Who cares what he thinks? I won.” he cupped his hand against Hannibal’s cheek and kissed him slowly. “I won,” he repeated with a smile. The lights started to dim and they took their seats. Will put an arm around Hannibal’s shoulder and drew him close. Hannibal relaxed into him and ate a piece of sushi from the plate. It was comfortable. Will enjoyed the play and the music and when it ended with a wedding he clapped and said, “See that: that’s how a story with singing should end.” Hannibal smiled at him while clapping. “That was fantastic,” said Will. Everyone was on their feet as they clapped and the three of them stood to clap.

“Did you enjoy it Richard?”

“I loved it, and I liked the chandeliers.”

“Excellent,” Hannibal said with a smile. As the curtain dropped on the last bows he said, “Let’s let this place clear out so we don’t have to make polite conversation.”

“Then we’ll go eat steak,” said Will.

“Theater and a plate full of meat,” Hannibal smiled, “can’t think of a better night.” They waited a while, watching the place clear out. Once the place was mostly empty Hannibal said, “Let’s go.” They went downstairs and the place was mostly cleared out other than the staff. Outside the valets saw Hannibal and instantly ran to get the car. There were people waiting before them, men in tuxes and women in gowns but Hannibal’s car was pulled around first.

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Will was happy and warm. He was filled with steak and cake. They were home and in PJs and the dogs were asleep, curled up in their usual spots. His dad had gone up to bed and he and Hannibal were turning off the lights. Hannibal smiled and said, “That really is a cute haircut.”

Will smiled and went to him, kissing him slowly. Then he yawned into Hannibal’s mouth. “Sorry, I’m exhausted.”

“I was really impressed by you tonight,” said Hannibal.

“How so?” asked Will.

“You were talking to Rachel by yourself, having a conversation, which was very impressive.”

Will nodded, “It was hard at first but I focused on my breathing and just stuck to a conversation I knew she could carry.”

Hannibal nodded, “Very impressive. But it must have been quite taxing.”

Sighing Will said, “Being me is very hard.”

Hannibal laughed, “You’re exhausted. Do you know what the nicest part of being in a committed relationship is?”

“What?” asked Will.

“We just went out on a very romantic date and now we’re going to go to bed, curl up and pass out without having sex because you’re exhausted.”

Will smiled into a kiss, “That sounds fantastic.”

Hannibal took him by the hand and, in the bedroom, he started to strip Will as Will returned the favor. Hannibal laid Will’s suit and his tux out on a chair and said, “Next week we’ll start moving everything upstairs.”

Will laughed, “You’ve been angling to move me into the upstairs bedroom for ages.”

Hannibal nodded. “It’s true, and I usually get what I want. It’s better to have you in the master bedroom. Better view, nicer shower.”

Will laughed and then crawled into bed. “If you’re hoping to get away from the dogs I should point out that if that space suddenly becomes occupied they’re going to want to find their spots to sleep in.”

“Will,” Hannibal came to the bed and curled into him. “I’m actually growing quite fond of your dogs.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

“So can they sleep in the bed?”

“No,” Hannibal kissed his neck, “but if one of them urinates on my shoe I won’t cook him into Boshintang.”

“What’s that?”

“A delicious Korean soup made with dog meat.”

Will laughed, “Please don’t eat my dogs.”

“I’d much sooner eat a person than Harry.”

Will chuckled as he took Hannibal's hand into his own.

He woke up suddenly and covered in sweat. He looked around the room quickly, searching for monsters in the shadows. Hannibal was still fast asleep so Will assumed he hadn't been too loud or kicking. With skin itching and dripping with salt, Will knew he wasn't falling back to sleep soon. He got out of bed quietly and went into the bathroom to dry off and wash his face. The man in the mirror looked haunted. He told himself what Mort would say, "You're alone," he spoke softly. "There are no monsters. That was just a dream. That was an invention of your mind." He thought about the dream and said, "The stag didn't gouge out a little girl's eyes. You've seen her somewhere, the supermarket or the street, she's fine. Breathe out," he did as he was told. He left the bathroom silently, grabbed his robe and walked in the dark, aware of his fears but assuring himself he was alone, to his kitchen where he turned on the light.

It didn't take long for him to make the chocolate milk, to settle down, he looked around his quiet kitchen. It was well lit, banishing the dark, sending the fears skittering into the night. Usually he never turned on the lights after a nightmare, afraid that if he woke up fully he would never go back to sleep. But Mort had told him to replay old rituals. His dad always turned on the lights when he had nightmares. This kitchen was far superior to any he'd grown up in.

It was true what his dad had said, that Will had been a happy kid. If he had his dad, stray dogs and boats he was happy. But always being the new kid was hard. It took him a long time to make friends and if you moved with the seasons you never had time to put down roots. In New Orleans he'd always been an outsider. That city only accepted its own. He talked creole but he hadn't grown up there and had never bought into the drunken, jolly, lawless way of life. He liked order, he liked sobriety and the never ending party had left him anxious and scared. When he'd come here he had decided he wanted a home, he wanted permanence. This house was his little domain, he loved every inch of it. He had gathered possessions, dogs and friends and made his life exactly what he wanted. If Jack Crawford left him alone he would sleep every night in a contented dreamless state.

His dad would soon be getting his dream house too. The house had been planned as a ranch so that his dad wouldn't have to deal with stairs when he was old, with a wood burning fireplace, with thick sturdy walls that would keep the cool in in the summer and the cold out in the winter, with central air and heating, with wood floors and a wraparound porch with a ramp — again for when he got old. It was the house he'd always fantasized about and Will was able to give it to him. That made Will happy to the bone. His dad had always done everything for him, worked hard his whole life and done his best to provide for his children.

And now Will, a success despite his limitations, was finally able to do something for his dad. Parquet floors weren't exactly the same as sitting by his bed in the hospital but his dad had always liked wood and pretty things. He'd lived his life on cheap rugs and linoleum and Will could give him that much.

Buster had woken up and came and looked up at him as if to say, "Why are you in here? Can we play?" He picked the dog up and put him in his lap. He stroked the dog to calm him down and drank his milk, feeling himself calm down. He was half way through his glass when he

heard feet on the stairs. He felt his anxiety spike: what if it wasn't his dad. What if it was a stranger?

But then his dad came into the kitchen and said softly, "You okay, boy?"

Will nodded, "I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't. I woke up for a glass of water," he held out his glass. "The tap upstairs doesn't run as cold as the faucet down here. Why are you up?"

"Nightmare."

"And why are you drinking chocolate milk?" Will told him about Mort's theory and the placebo drug and his dad listened as he filled his glass. Will sipped his drink and his dad said, "Is it working?"

Will nodded, "I'm a lot calmer than I usually am half an hour after a nightmare."

"Y'wanna tell me about your dream?"

Will shook his head, "You should go back to sleep, Daddy. I'll be okay: I'll finish this, rinse the glass and go back to bed. Honestly, I'll be fine."

"Will it be better for you if I go back to sleep or worse?"

Will thought about it before saying, "It won't make a difference."

"Then I'd rather stay."

"Okay, you're going home in a day. I'll be fine."

"I believe you. You've made yourself some nice friends. I'm worried about your work with the BAU."

"I know," said Will.

"Honey, I took over your guardianship to help you, not to run your life. I'm not going to force you to quit. You're an adult, I'm not going to treat you like a child. But I am going to remind you that if you want to quit but don't want to actually participate in the act of quitting, I'll quit for you."

Will wanted to quit, boy howdy did he wanted to quit, but he hadn't told his dad how his new job was connected to his old. That if he quit he was out of his teaching job. He loved teaching. He hadn't told his dad because he knew that if he did his father would go ahead and quit for him, would tell him he could teach elsewhere, that he was being exploited. But he liked the FBI academy. Not wanting to lie he said, "I like helping people. I want to make sure the FBI gets the guy." That was wholly true but he could do that by training people instead of going into the field. "When I need to quit I'm going to need you to do it."

His dad nodded, "I can do that."

“Thank you,” he drained the glass. The grainy mix at the bottom was gross, he’d never liked it. But he’d always drank it as a kid because he hadn’t wanted to waste any milk. He gently removed Buster from his lap and washed his glass out and said, “I’m gonna go back to bed. Thanks for sitting with me, Daddy.”

“Of course, honey. You know, you can call me if you have a nightmare and need company in the night.”

Will smiled, “I know. Love you.”

His dad came and hugged him, “I love you too, Will.”

Will hugged him for a few moments before releasing him. “Night, Daddy.”

“Night, boy,” his dad went back to the stairs and Will went back to the bedroom, feeling sleepy and warm. He slid into the bed and Hannibal wrapped around him.

“Alright?” asks Hannibal, not really awake.

“Yeah,” Will said and relaxed into the hold.

He woke up slowly and felt that Hannibal was still sleeping. He didn’t open his eyes, just breathed and focused on visualizing his day. When he was done he rolled over and kissed Hannibal gently before climbing out of bed. Birds were singing outside and he stretched before putting on sweats and a t-shirt. He brushed his teeth in the bathroom and didn’t look haunted in the mirror. There were no circles under his eyes. In the kitchen he made coffee and let the dogs out into the yard. He felt good within his own skin; he felt well rested and calm. He drank his first coffee standing at the sink watching the dogs. There were footsteps behind him but he wasn’t worried. An arm came around his waist and Hannibal kissed his neck.

“Morning,” said Will. “Coffee?”

“I’ll get it myself,” said Hannibal still nuzzling his neck. “Did you get out of bed in the middle of the night?”

“For a while,” agreed Will. “Nightmare. Mort’s trick helped. I slept well.”

“Good,” Hannibal kissed his neck one more time before moving back and reaching for the coffee. “What’s on for today?”

“Abigail wanted to see us today. Dad and I got a book of color swatches for paints. I thought we’d bring her for lunch, get her more used to this being her home, let her consider the colors while actually looking at the room. All of the Hobbs’ possessions were shipped last week. It’s in storage here now. She’s working up the nerve to go through it. I’d like her to feel more secure in her place here before doing that.”

“Good point,” agreed Hannibal.

“What do you want to do today?” asked Will.

“I wondered if you wanted to get me out of your hair,” said Hannibal. “You haven’t gotten a lot of alone time with your dad. He leaves tonight. You’ve always gotten more in the past.”

“I didn’t have any friends in the past,” Will reminded him. “We’ve spent most days by ourselves, fishing, playing with the dogs, working on the boat. You weren’t here yesterday and you’re not intruding.”

“If you’re certain then I would like to make a masterpiece of a breakfast.”

Hannibal started moving around the kitchen like a man performing a dance. Will enjoyed the show and his dad came down and watched the production for a few moments before moving to get coffee. “What’s the occasion?”

“It’s Sunday morning and you leave this evening. I wanted to do something special,” Hannibal shrugged.

“How very kind of you. I just finished packing and smelled something delicious.”

“I hope it is,” agreed Hannibal.

“So, what’s our plan for today? Lunch with Abigail, what else?” he asked as he sipped his coffee.

“Nothing, what else would you like to do?” asked Will. “Museum, monuments?”

“Or, sit around drinking coffee and talking all morning and then taking a nice long walk with the dogs all over your property and up the river after lunch,” suggested his dad.

Hannibal smiled at him, “Richard, I was asking Will before — and please do be honest I will not be hurt — would you like me to make myself scarce this afternoon?”

“No, not at all,” said his dad. “Unless you have something else to do today?”

“I have a couple hours of transcribing to do.” Hannibal shrugged. “I can do it between patients tomorrow.”

“Will, do you have anything you have to do?”

Will said, “I can go to the supermarket tomorrow, that’s all.”

His dad nodded, “Here’s a plan: coffee and sitting about this morning, then Hannibal can make some fancy lunch while we pick up Abigail and then we can drive Abigail back and hit the supermarket while Hannibal does his transcribing. Then we can go for our walk. And we’ll go to Tally’s for dinner.”

“Hannibal, you might want to give Tally’s a miss,” said Will.

“What is Tally’s?”

“It’s a North Carolina style barbeque joint on the way to the airport,” Will said.

“I may like it. I have never had North Carolina style barbeque. And it’s proximity to the airport is not necessarily a bad sign.”

“There’s a red plastic fast food basket on each table filled with individually wrapped wet-naps.”

“Please don’t make me go there,” said Hannibal with a serious look, no hint of a joke in his eyes.

“Okay, new plan: we sit around drinking coffee I’ll do laundry to make sure Daddy goes home with all clean clothes. Then we’ll get Abigail while you make lunch and do a little transcribing. Then we’ll drive her back and you can finish transcribing while we’re at the supermarket, we’ll go for our walk. Then Daddy and I will go to Tally’s and the airport while you go home, cook a dinner to your liking in your lovely kitchen, pick up a suit for the morning and meet me back here around nine,” said Will. “I would say that we won’t go to Tally’s but you’ve been worried about intruding and we’ve always gone to Tally’s the last night Daddy’s visit. The first time, when I had just moved here, we stumbled upon it. It’s amazing but you would hate it.”

Hannibal smiled, “That sounds like a great plan. I intended on meeting Alana for lunch tomorrow. It’s been a while since we had lunch alone so I wanted to make something a little special.”

“What, more special than you make for me?” Will joked.

“Alana likes exotic meat — you do not,” Hannibal said, “it’s different.” He kissed Will as he placed plates of little pancakes, potato dumplings, porridge and an assortment of meats on the table.

“How many people are coming for breakfast?” Will said, teasing him.

“We have no intention of doing anything this morning,” said Hannibal. “Why not spend it eating?” He smiled, “I just cooked almost everything in your refrigerator… everything I don’t need for lunch with Abigail.”

“Make me a list,” said Will. “I’ll just add your stuff to my regular list. You pretty much live here so there should be everything you want.”

“So good to me,” said Hannibal jokingly. Then seriously he said, “Thank you.”

“Of course,” said Will. He ate too much delicious food and got up, gathering all the laundry, his dad’s, his and Hannibal’s. He made another pot of coffee and went back to grazing as he dad asked Hannibal about being a psychiatrist Hannibal was talking vaguely, not wanting to break confidentiality. It was nice. Eventually they got dressed but the conversation kept flowing.

Late in the morning Hannibal started cooking again and Will and his dad left to get Abigail. They listened to zydeco and his dad said, “Have you booked your flights yet for the Zydeco Festival?”

“No, not yet. They’re not cheap yet.”

“Are you excited?”

“All the food I grew up with, all the music I love being played live, nice weather and your company: I’m excited.”

“Crowds, the family and the city itself freak you out.”

Will nodded, “If breathing exercises aren’t enough I’m bringing clonazepam as a backup… I actually need Mort to give me a refill.”

“I really wish you didn’t need drugs to come see me.”

“I really wish my cousins would stop hugging me to say hello. We all have our crosses to bear. But as long as people think it’s okay to touch others without permission and forewarning I’m going to need to occasionally pop a clonazepam.”

“I’m gonna pat your knee.”

“You never need permission or forewarning, Daddy.”

When they pulled up to the hospital his dad said, “This is so much nicer than the one you were in.”

“Yes,” agreed Will, “but no more and no less beneficial to the patients.” He parked in his usual spot and said, “Let’s go get our girl.”

Inside he started to sign Abigail out while a nurse went to get her. When she came she had clearly been crying. “Abigail, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I’ve just been skyping with JT. I’m fine, glad to get out of here for a little while.”

“Hannibal’s cooking lunch and we got color swatches for your room.”

“And I get to see the dogs,” Abigail reminded him.

“Thank goodness you like dogs.” He checked his watch before adding to the time to the log out. “Let’s go.” In the car he said, “Pick a station, Abigail.”

“I always thought the driver gets to pick the music,” she said.

Will thought about it for a moment, “Good point, want to drive?”

“Seriously?”

“You have a license,” he said. “When you’re young you need as much practice as you can get.” He unbuckled and opened his door, “Let’s switch.”

“Cool,” she said, getting out of the back. In front, she tuned to a pop radio station and slowly pulled out of the space. “I’m gonna need directions.” His dad guided her down streets and she

was smiling for most of the time.

Will hated the music but she was right, driver picks the music. She was a surprisingly good driver and didn't speed. He relaxed as they went and she started to smile more. By the time they got home she seemed normal, maybe the Lady Gaga helped too.

Inside it smelled like something frying and in the kitchen Hannibal smiled and said, "I thought you might like comfort food and in this country that means fried things. I'm making chicken and fries."

"I love homemade fries," said Abigail.

"Everyone does, the world over," Hannibal replied.

"I got diet ginger ale," Will said.

"That's my favorite," said Abigail.

"I know," agreed Will.

They had a nice lunch and Abigail poured over the color book. She found the shade of mauve she wanted quickly and then was looking at wood colors. "It's pine under the white paint that's there now," Will said, "If you want literal pale wood work I can just strip and varnish it."

"Will, that sounds like a lot of work," said Abigail. "I don't want to give you a lot of work."

Will shook his head, "I find my job really stressful, really stressful. I find working with my hands soothing and pleasurable. Stripping with wood would take some time away from the boat but it wouldn't be a chore. If that's what you would like then I'm more than happy to do it."

"That would be really pretty," said Abigail. "I'd like that."

Will reached out and turned the pages of the book to the stains. He pointed at the right page, "Those are the stains you should pick from."

Abigail flicked back and forth to the mauve and finally pointed at one, "That one please."

"Great," said Will. "I'm gonna have to distract myself from missing Daddy once he's gone and it'll be good to do it."

"When are you leaving, Richard?" asked Abigail.

"Tonight," he nodded. "Flying out after dinner."

"Glad to get back to the heat?" she asked.

With a nod he said, "That is going to be the only drawback to retiring up here."

They talked about the design for his house and they showed her the plans. “That’s some porch,” she said.

“I’ve a lifetime in my father’s house, in rented apartments, condos, houses thinking about what I’d want if I ever had a house of my own. I’ve yearned for a wraparound porch. And Will’s building me one.”

“Not with my bare hands, Daddy.”

“Beautiful floor,” said Abigail looking at the plans.

“It’s gonna be wonderful,” his dad said. Buster jumped up into his lap and his dad stroked him. “Yes, it is, Buster, it is.” The dog cuddled into him.

Will smiled at him, feeling truly contented as he ate with his people. With colors chosen Will checked his watch, “We gotta get you back for your appointment with Alana.”

“Yeah,” she sighed, “This was fun.”

“The next time you come your room will be a work in progress,” said Will.

“I’m excited,” said Abigail. “Hannibal, everything was delicious, as always.” She hugged him goodbye and said, “I’ll see you some time in the week?”

“Either Wednesday or Thursday, I’m not sure about one of appointments but I will let you know by Tuesday and I’ll bring us a picnic lunch.”

“You could just bring yourself,” she said with a smile, “I’d like that just as much.”

“I was planning on making chicken salad,” said Hannibal.

“I do like chicken salad,” she said. She smiled, “But are you going to do chicken salad or are you going to make something with some crazy rare bird?”

Hannibal sighed, “The two people I care most deeply for in the world don’t appreciate my cooking.”

“I love your cooking, I love trying new food, but I don’t like meat I don’t recognize. I got tricked into cannibalism. Weird meat makes me nervous. I know you would never feed me human flesh,” she said.

“I’m very glad you believe that,” said Hannibal with a tiny, amused smile.

“But, even trusting you, unknown meat makes me queasy.”

He sighed, over dramatically, “I’ll make coronation chicken, it’s more sophisticated but recognizably chicken.”

“I would love that. I’m up for anything as long as I recognize the protein.”

He smiled, “I do appreciate your adventurous palate.” He gave her a brief hug and said, “I will call you Tuesday.”

Will, his dad and Abigail headed out and Will held the keys out to her. “Thank you,” she said, accepting them.

They listened to irritating music that she sang along to and, as they pulled into the parking lot, they saw Alana getting out of her car. “Hey, Alana,” Will greeted her, climbing out of the backseat.

“Hey, lunch?” she asked.

“Yeah. I picked the paint for my room,” said Abigail with a smile. “It was great. I played with the dogs.”

“I’m glad to see you,” said his dad, “I’m leaving tonight.”

“Oh, how sad for us,” said Alana. “But soon we’ll have you here permanently.”

“They’re breaking ground tomorrow,” his dad agreed.

“I can’t wait to see,” Alana said with a smile. “Are you ready for your appointment, Abigail?”

“Yeah, but Will needs to sign me in or else they’re going to think I’ve gone over the wall again,” she laughed at her own joke. They headed inside and as Will signed the papers Abigail said, “Richard, are you like Will or can I hug you without you freezing?”

He laughed and hugged her, “I can’t wait for us to be neighbors.”

“It’s been wonderful getting to know you,” said Abigail.

They left her with Alana and went to the supermarket, picking up staples and supplies for the week. He got everything he wanted, plus what Hannibal wanted and broccoli because it was on sale for ninety-nine cents a pound. It was nice.

“Y’know, I’m not scared of leaving you,” his dad said as they packed the groceries into the car.

“Because I’m buying vegetables?” asked Will.

His dad laughed, “No, though it is nice to see that. No, it’s watching you with Abigail. It’s watching you with people in your house. You’ve always been fine when left alone, always been capable and happy when no one was around to encroach on your space or thoughts. But seeing you at that dinner party? Watching you at lunch today? I have never seen you this comfortable around people in your life. It’s almost like we’re alone. You’re that comfortable.”

“JT was kind of right, I finally found my people,” Will shrugged. “It’s not hard with them.”

“That makes me so happy to hear.”

When they got home the dogs acted like they were gone for years and get under their feet. “Hannibal, what did you do to make them like this?”

“I think I sat still for too long and they forgot I was here. But my transcribing is done and the afternoon is ours.” He closed his iPad as Will put the last of the groceries away. They talked about seeing Alana and about the beautiful weather. They walked over the plot to have one last look at it, unspoiled by construction equipment. It would soon be too dangerous to walk there with the dogs so they enjoyed it while they could. Down by the river the dogs walked down to the edge to lap at the water.

It really was a beautiful afternoon. The sun was warm and his dad sighed, “It will be nice moving up here.” Time went by too fast for Will’s taste and soon they were in a booth in Tally’s eating pork sandwiches, red slaw, fries and hushpuppies. “When I move up here we’re coming to Tally’s once a month.”

“Agreed,” said Will. He licked his fingers. “I love this place.” At the airport they hugged each other tightly. “Text me when you get home? I know it’ll be late but I’d like to wake up to a message.”

“Promise.” His dad released him and said, “Talk to you soon, honey.”

“Love you, Daddy.”

“Love you too.”

He watched his dad walk toward security before turning back. In his car, he called Hannibal, “I’m on my way home.”

“I’m eating sorbet then I’m getting in the car.”

“There’s no rush, I’ll see you at home.” He hung up and listened to his new Chris Ardoin. He wasn’t as sad as he usually was when his dad left. He felt fine. He sang along, feeling happy in the music. It was strange. It took him a half hour to get home and he took the dogs out for a stroll. The evening was cool and he said, “You boys are gonna miss him, aren’t you? No new toys, not as much of me. I gotta go to work tomorrow. But you’re gonna be good, right? And I gotta go to Mort’s after work.” They kept bring him toys to throw. They didn’t go far before heading back inside. He washed his hands and face and brushed his teeth. The dogs all settled in and Will checked his briefcase, making sure he had everything for the morning.

Hannibal opened the door and the dogs all got out of their beds quickly to greet him. He held the suit bag above his head and patted them all. “Hello, hello, yes: the hours we’ve been apart have been agony for me as well.”

“You sort of like my dogs, don’t you?” asked Will with a smile.

“My aunt had a mastiff bitch of whom I was quite fond.” Hannibal was still patting the dog. “She used to follow me around, back when I was still mute. She required nothing from me

except pats on the head in return for her companionship. I appreciate your dogs for what they give to you. I value your dogs for the bond you have with them… And Charlie is very entertaining."

"I feel weird," said Will.

Hannibal looked away from the dogs, "Are you dizzy?"

"No, it's not my head: I'm fine. But I'm fine. It feels weird to be okay. I feel like a jigsaw puzzle that isn't put together but there are no pieces missing from the box." He smiled at Hannibal. "Want to go to bed and have sex with the door open?"

"That sounds wonderful," agreed Hannibal.

End Notes

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